

Opening Statement
The Honorable Dan Burton
International Relations Committee
Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific
Hearing: “The United States and Southeast Asia:
Developments, Trends, and Policy Choices”
Wednesday, September 21, 2005

Mr. Chairman, thank you for convening this timely and important hearing to highlight the recent developments, trends, and U.S. policy in Southeast Asia. I am particularly interested in hearing the views of our witnesses today on democratization, security, Islamisation and human rights. I appreciate that you are also looking closely at the real risk that Southeast Asia is becoming part of the Chinese sphere of influence, at the expense of weakening American ties to the region.

As Co-chairman of the Congressional Indonesia Caucus I have a keen interest in our bilateral relationship with Indonesia. The post-Tsunami relief and reconstruction afforded major new opportunities to strengthen our relationship with Indonesia and Thailand. We responded with a public and private mobilization of aid, and our military’s emergency role in the early post disaster period was greatly appreciated.

Several months ago I was concerned about the inability of ASEAN to forge a policy on Burma. Yet, after growing political pressure from the ASEAN community and the international community – the Burmese Government relinquished the rotating ASEAN Chairmanship during the Ministers’ Meeting in Vientiane. We must continue pressure on Rangoon to address human rights violations. I have joined with other members of Congress to support efforts to refer Burma to the UN Security Council. The UN General Assembly has passed 12 consecutive resolutions calling for the authorities in Burma to engage in "national reconciliation" and the UN Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR) has passed 13 consecutive resolutions calling for the ruling junta to cease its brutal human rights abuses. However, Burma's military regime has refused to work with the Secretary General's office, barring his envoy from entering the country since 2003; the junta has also barred the special rapporteur on human rights appointed by the Human Rights Commission.

Burma has recruited more child soldiers than any other country in the world, destroyed over 2,500 villages in eastern Burma alone; Burma is the only country in history to be a target of sanctions as called for by International Labor Organization (a United Nations agency); the military regime uses

rape as a weapon of war against its own citizens. The junta presents a threat to international peace and security that must be confronted by the United Nations Security Council.

Last week, I – along with several other colleagues – sent a letter to President Bush, calling on the President to urge Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra to end his support for Burma's military government. While other ASEAN countries, including the Philippines, Singapore, Indonesia, and Malaysia have actively sought to increase pressure on Burma, the Thai government has become Southeast Asia's chief supporter of the Burmese military dictatorship. In the months ahead I sincerely hope that ASEAN nations continue to put pressure on Burma as well as create a stronger dialogue with the Thai government.

ASEAN must now look to the future and redouble efforts to strengthen legal, institutional and regulatory frameworks, as well as work towards the goal of integration. In fact, during their most recent meeting, the leaders of ASEAN discussed the importance of the Initiative for ASEAN Integration (IAI), and how the developed and economically stable Member Countries will play an integral role in providing the less developed Member Countries with bilateral technical assistance in order to facilitate the regional integration of ASEAN.

Furthermore, I was pleased to see that issues of well-being and health are a major focus for the nations of ASEAN, who recently "...expressed [their] concern over the serious threat to human health posed by the evolving, unprecedented spread of avian influenza...and reaffirmed [their] commitment to developing national pandemic influenza preparedness plans and implementing surveillance of human and avian influenza in order to provide an early warning of, and a timely response to outbreaks in poultry and in humans." President Bush – during his September 14th address at the United Nations – announced the formal creation of the International Partnership on Avian and Pandemic Influenza, which will enhance medical readiness to contain – and more importantly, prevent – a global influenza pandemic. This announcement came hours before Indonesian health officials confirmed the fourth human death from bird flu.

It is also my sincere hope that the United States will continue to directly engage the nations of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations directly, and work on strengthening and expanding cooperation on counterterrorism and other transnational crime efforts, developing work plans to improve the exchange of information, build law-enforcement capacity, and protect land, sea, and air transport. Not only will these efforts help in combating the ruthless and murderous thugs who are

bent on destroying the emerging democracies of Southeast Asia, but will also foster strong political will and cooperation. Already we have witnessed ASEAN Members reaching out and expanding cooperation in areas of information exchange, and law enforcement capacity-building efforts through training and education.

As we have all witnessed – especially in the wake of Hurricane Katrina – there has been increased speculation and concern over the impact of the rising oil prices, and this poses a significant challenge to the region of Southeast Asia – and no where is this more evident than the country of Indonesia, where oil subsidies have increased to over one-fourth of the Government’s 2005 budget. In fact – this year alone – the Indonesian Rupiah has lost more than 5% of its value, and is currently at its lowest level since March 2002. While the potential cutting of the fuel subsidy in Indonesia remains a major hurdle, I am positive that President Yudhoyono will carefully balance the economic concerns of the government with the needs of the country’s poorest citizens.

Along those same lines, as the Co-Founder and Co-Chairman of the Congressional Indonesia Caucus, I wish to comment briefly on my observations with regards to the world’s largest Muslim country, and third largest democracy. As you are well aware, Indonesia has embarked on a dramatic transition to democratic governance over the past six years, culminating in the country’s first directly-elected President. Indonesia serves as a role model for democracies throughout the world. Economic growth and political reforms can and must occur in tandem. More foreign investment in this resource-rich country - with a population of 230 million - will not only create new employment opportunities, but it will also help improve the standard of living for many Indonesians. And, as you can imagine, the positive role that U.S. foreign policy, business and investment can play is enormous.

Furthermore, I was pleased that – during last week’s Senate Foreign Relations Committee Hearing – Deputy Assistant Secretary Eric John reaffirmed that the United States supports the territorial integrity of Indonesia. The Papuans and Indonesian government must build a solid and stable partnership of cooperation and find an equitable and peaceful solution to the situation in Papua. I believe that Special Autonomy offers the best chance for a peaceful resolution to the conflict, following in the model of the agreement in Aceh, Indonesia. This law offers the Papuans greater economic benefits and political independence and control over their local affairs. It is my hope that President Yudhoyono continues to aggressively pursue negotiations to bring this conflict to a peaceful resolution; moreover, let me stress that this situation must be resolved by the Papuans and Indonesian government – this is not the place for the United States Congress.

Thank you again, Mr. Chairman, for holding this hearing. Well into the future, ASEAN's active and important role in trade, investment, counterterrorism and security cooperation will not only benefit the policy goals of the United States Government, but serve as a source of stability and vibrant economic activity. I look forward to hearing the testimony of all of our witnesses today.